

Projects and Processes

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***Abstract:** The difference between projects and processes are discussed, and the manner in which each works with the other to create results within organisations.*

I have found that as organisations seek effective mechanisms for implementing business change there is some confusion between projects, processes and their management. In this article I will introduce projects, processes, and discuss process re-engineering activities and approaches.

Projects DO work, marshalling resources to accomplish a specific activity. They:

- are established for a specific time frame
- [should] have clearly defined objectives and success/completion criteria
- are unique endeavours (i.e. they are not repetitive operational activities and the products, services or results are specific creations of the project)
- rely on a temporary organisation

Processes DEFINE work, detailing the sequence and approach followed in performing groups of tasks within the organisation. In documenting a process, you:

- identify a chain of discrete activities that comprise the work to be performed
- treat each activity in the chain as the customer of its predecessor, which enables the establishment of clear quality requirements
- detail, for each process step, the inputs, outputs, triggers for commencement, description of work to be performed, completion criteria and other information necessary for successful accomplishment of a step

Project management manages the process of meeting project requirements by applying the appropriate skills, tools, techniques etc. **Process management** manages the definition, development and enhancement of processes by applying the appropriate skills, tools, techniques etc. Project management itself is a process. It can be defined and implemented within an organisation as a process. Anyone familiar with both project management and process management and who has read "The Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge" (PMBOK™) published by the Project Management Institute (PMI®) will recognise that the document clearly identifies and describes the 'project management' process.

When seeking to improve business processes there are two extremes on a continuum of approaches: re-engineering and streamlining. **Re-engineering** is the radical redesign of processes to achieve real gains in service or product quality, reduce performance time or to cut costs. **Streamlining** is the modest adjustment of processes to address problems and introduce optimal methods for performing the work.

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In seeking to develop effectiveness within an organisation it is important to:

- **Define:** Accurately define and follow all existing processes, and eradicate immediately anything that is illegal and unsafe is discovered
- **Optimise:** Existing problems in business processes identified in the first phase are fixed (equivalent to streamlining). Significant performance improvements can be expected.
- **Re-engineer:** The future direction of the organisation is identified and defined by researching markets, emerging technologies, the economy, its own strategy and other factors influencing the organisational environment. The result may be a radical change to the business approach, with the removal of existing processes, creation of new processes, and implementation of measure for assessing results and ensuring the desired outcomes are realised.

Performing the above and creating an organisation with effective processes is a project. When considering process improvement a raft of approaches is available. Examples include Continuous Improvement, Just-In-Time (JIT), benchmarking, Kaizen, and supplier partnerships to name but a few. Implementing these would be a project. The result would be improved work processes.

Processes define the work, how the work is accomplished, and they are typically used in an operational setting where the functions are routine and repetitive. Projects are a way of accomplishing work, and are usually for non-routine undertakings. A manufacturing line operates as a process. Establishing the initial line and the operational process is a project because it is a one-time activity, as is a process improvement undertaking. The way in which an organisation manages its projects is a process; establishing and/or improving that process is a project. The distinction between projects and processes is real and significant, but they are not mutually exclusive. Process and project management are complementary, together providing powerful capacity for improvement and change.